

erable investment which universities make in their libraries.

Collection adequacy is very high, with the library owning 90% of all items its users seek. However, as Swanson has pointed out, *people try to use the library only when they have good reason to think they will succeed*<sup>16</sup> and it is plausible to suppose that repeated failures will discourage future attempts.

For those who do persist, it is clear that the catalogue — and particularly a large catalogue — is often an insurmountable obstacle. To an extent, librarians must take the blame for this. Their choices of entry and of filing hierarchies, while usually consistent and logical, are not always those expected by the innocent user, and remain mysterious to many for whose benefit they were created. Also the card catalogue is not notably hospitable to alternative search approaches or to errors on the user's part. The move to machine-readable catalogues providing interactive search capability on a variety of bibliographical elements is likely to bring considerable improvement. Until such facilities are available the library must redouble its efforts to instruct users in the principles of catalogue use and must endeavour to have knowledgeable librarians on hand to assist those who appear to be in trouble.

The large proportion of shelf failure which is also due to users' errors is further proof of the need for more intensive and extensive programs of user education, and for the ready availability of staff to assist the unsuccessful searcher. Again, it is likely that librarians are partly at fault for having made their libraries unnecessarily complicated and difficult to use. The arrangement of books in a large bookstack is complex and often beyond the understanding of the user for whom it has been designed. Improvements in signposting and shelf layout are among the remedial measures which should be implemented. Again, the larger the library the more separate locations there are likely to be for the various parts of the collections, and clear guidance in the meaning and importance of location information is essential.

It is a cliché, though a true one, that the library is the

heart of the university, and that a first quality library is essential to a first quality university. However, the library should be much more than 'a singular ornament in the University', to quote Sir Thomas Bodley's hope for the library he gave to Oxford. It should be a partner in the processes of teaching, learning and research, but it will be a weak partner unless it can deliver the goods.

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14. See, for example, Saracevic, *op. cit.*, and J.A. Urquhart, & J.L. Schofield, 'Measuring readers' failure at the shelf', in *J. Documentation*, 27, 1971, pp. 273-286.
15. See, for example, Saracevic, *op. cit.*, Smith & Granade, *op. cit.*, and Palmer, *op. cit.*
16. D.R. Swanson, 'Libraries and the growth of knowledge', in *Library Q.*, 49, 1979, p. 9.

## ART STUDY AND THE ART MARKET: WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITIES?

A small group of energetic and well-intentioned Visual Arts students at the Flinders University recently set about the organization of a selling exhibition of so-called 'transitional' art on the campus, with the generous intention of making the profits of their enterprise available to the University's Art Museum for the acquisition of new art works for the Collection. This Collection, it should be noticed, has the primary function of serving the teaching and research needs of the Visual Arts Discipline, as well as those of other researchers and students of art. 'Transitional' art is work displaying a marked influence of one culture on another (usually the Western influences on, e.g., North-West Coast Amerindian, or Australian Aboriginal) and it is a topic of special interest within Visual Arts at Flinders.

Of course an occasional art sale held on a university campus, yielding (most probably) little or no profit, is not a dramatic sample of the art market in action. Nevertheless it is a sample of the art market in action, and we had better decide what significant questions of principle, if any, are implicated. Why, for example, should we not establish a regular art dealership operating directly through the Museum, to its own profitable advantage? If that is different, precisely how is it different, apart from scale and regularity of operation?

The first strong point to be made must surely be that no Australian university can be taken to task for engaging in and with the normal affairs and practices of the external world *tout court*. To be more specific: we at Flinders see ourselves as part of the world and not as isolated from it. We are interested in the things that interest everyone; we are supported in a range of ways by public and private funding; we see nothing wrong in principle with the buying and selling of works of art as contrasted with commerce in other goods and we are generally pleased and grateful to have our teaching and research supported by donors who think well of us. No universal claim that scholarship and commerce are incompatible can be made to seem remotely plausible.

Some comparisons may be useful. In spite of the ambivalence many people feel toward drugs and — quite independently — toward multinational corporations, nobody seriously argues that funding injected more or less directly by multi-national drug corporations into medical pharmacological and biochemical research in the universities should all be rejected. We are thoroughly accustomed to seeing the profits of commercial enterprise of all kinds

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enter the domain of scholarship, even to the extent of commissioning specific research. The universities themselves are engaging more and more in the marketing of ideas and inventions, and are extremely alert to the advantages of patent ownership, property rights and other niceties of the business apparatus.

Resistance to the complete assimilation of university scholarship into the world's ordinary economic, social and commercial routines is concentrated at two main positions: a sort of defence in depth, with more determination applied at the fall-back position than at the front line. The front line is drawn roughly where commercial pressures begin to determine what will be researched and taught in the universities. This line is manned principally by extremely conservative academic ideologues who insist that a socially endorsed economic need for (let us say) cheaper energy, or new energy sources, should in no way influence the direction of scientific research in the universities — although it may legitimately do so in other parts of the tertiary system and in publicly funded research organisations such as C.S.I.R.O. It is not at all clear what should influence these directions: the conception of 'pure' research is notoriously obscure. The ultimate cash value of an increment of knowledge is often not assessable, and provides a woefully inadequate criterion of purity.

The fall-back position is more vigorously defended by many more academics. If the universities are to retain their distinctive character and, indeed, their ultimate *raison d'être*, the encroachment of ordinary commerce must be resisted not so much — if at all — at the point of determination of what is studied as at the point of determination of how it shall be studied. Very roughly indeed, it is said to be the scholar's business to perpetuate certain laboriously acquired and correspondingly precious standards of probity in the conduct of intellectual business. Scientific research must be conducted scientifically; research in art history must conform to the principles of 'the art historical method', and so on. Moral and political considerations can — so it is often suggested — be treated either as irrelevant or as already incorporated into the methodology of scholarship. For example, the testing of a new drug will go forward, in a university, strictly in accordance with a rigorous procedure built in to the methodology of the subject, ensuring that certain kinds of carelessness — and especially the more profitable kinds — do not occur. To put the point with crude simplicity: the distinctive function of the universities

within society is to maintain impeccable standards of probity in the conduct of teaching and research, to the ultimate advantage of everyone and not to the advantage of parties with a current particular interest. At any rate, it is to do that rather than — more simply still — to make discoveries of a kind or to teach subjects of a kind that are not made or taught elsewhere. To some extent we do things that other people do not do, but our justifying function is to do things better than they are done elsewhere because, on the negative side, we are free from the grosser constraints of the profit motive and, on the positive side, we have an accumulated resource of subject-methodologies historically enmeshed with a commitment to abstract virtues: truth, integrity, disinterestedness, accuracy, honesty, and so forth. We may well, as we look at one another, feel some misgivings; but we are surely entitled to see the game as beyond reproach, whatever we may privately think of the players.

This description of the position is radically simplified and idealised, along widely endorsed liberal bourgeois lines. I mean to draw upon only one main feature that would, I believe, remain recognizable even through a comprehensive programme of qualification and elaboration. It is the idea that Science, History, Medicine, Philosophy, etc., are subjects with distinctive subject-matter and methodologies that relate in one way to more or less abstract — and widely shared — scholarly virtues, and in another way to peculiarities of the subject matter, case by case. Perhaps Psychology is finally 'reducible' to Physics, but for the time being it seems clear that they are equally subjects in their own right, and that the universities are among the most plausible claimants to custody of the best ways of researching and teaching them.<sup>1</sup>

What, then, have these rather grand generalisations to do with the propriety of encouraging our students to sell art works on campus for the benefit of the University Art Museum? It is my purpose first of all to repudiate the suggestion that some universal thesis about the contamination of scholarship by commerce is implicated. I do not think that selling things is wicked in principle, or that devoting the proceeds of business to scholarly purposes is wicked in principle; I do not even rely upon the more plausible case that this combination might be reprehensible if it were to be indulged without restraint. A university department of Pharmacology, for example, that set up an on-campus drug warehouse, with special promotion of profitable lines by distinguished academics, would certainly raise eyebrows; and an equivalent kind of art dealership associated with the Art Museum would surely not need to be made the subject of a thoughtful essay of mine as a precondition for the arousal of public misgiving. The project under consideration is a little like that, but not enough like that to provoke serious anxiety.

The point lies deeper, and is not yet clearly exposed; it depends upon a peculiarity of Art (the subject), and not upon a generalisation about commerce.

The study of the visual arts is presently in a state of crisis that can conveniently be explained by reference to the example of Cognitive Psychology and its putative reduction to Physics. Psychology is **not** in crisis — or not in the same crisis — because the envisaged reduction is confidently regarded either as part of a programme for the very distant future, or as impossible. There is a shared conception, among cognitive psychologists, of the autonomy of central features of their distinctive subject matter. Propositional attitudes, for example, such as beliefs and desires, are not widely believed to be ripe for transfer to the distinctively different treatment they would be accorded in a department of Physics. There are intermediate stations available — for example, in Neurophysiology — but psychologists do not yet believe that their own efforts are seriously misconceived and that they lack a genuinely autonomous subject.

Neither, it is true, do most students of Art believe this. The difference is that they should believe, at least, that the study of Art is under serious intellectual threat, and that the defence had better not take the ostrich as its model. For some time, and in a variety of ways, it has been forcefully argued that works of art do not constitute a natural kind<sup>2</sup> and that the study called Art is ripe for redistribution as a series of topics within 'real' or 'proper' subjects such as Economics, Social History, Psychology, Politics, and so on. This rot set in, perhaps, with the Marxist initiative to see art works as (to put it baldly) social manifestations with the main ideological function of securing the hegemony of the currently ruling class.<sup>3</sup> However, the problem is not attributable only to 'left' political ideology. The Wittgensteinian philosophical style surfaced a view of art as an 'open concept'<sup>4</sup> which led, by natural stages, in the direction of radical versions of an 'institutional' theory of art.<sup>5</sup> The logical outcome of this theory amounts to a recognition that the concept of art is in no respect significantly transhistorical, and that so-called 'art works' are related only by the quasi-accident of their historical endorsement by a capricious Art Institution that is uncommitted to consistent criteria or principles in its endorsement procedures. In brief: there is no such thing (kind) as art, there is only the activity of the Art Institution and the various residues of that activity. In a similar and much more obvious way, there is no such subject as Collectibles (stamps, vintage cars, matchbox labels, antique furniture, etc.), although there might very well be a topic called Collecting, to be situated within genuine subject areas such as Cultural History and Psychology.

It happens to be my personal conviction that art objects are identifiable by consistent and transhis-

torical criteria, and hence that Art is a viable subject in its own right, with distinctive subject matter that is independent of art-institutional practices, and not a mere residue of these practices.<sup>6</sup> However, this is a position that nowadays needs to be argued for: its correctness — whether on my own or on some other criteria of art — can no longer be assumed. Just possibly Art, like Alchemy before it, is an intellectually unsupportable 'discipline'. And whether we incline to my own opinion, that Art is a genuine subject, or to the opinion that it is a topic within Anthropology or Social History, etc., we cannot afford to display an indifference to the way in which art works are embedded in art-institutional practices. In particular, we must be extremely alert to the operations of the contemporary art market.

The reason why we must take extraordinary care can now be brought out clearly. Whereas in Biochemistry (for example) scholars are entitled to some confidence<sup>7</sup> that the intellectual foundations of their subject are rationally independent of the machinations of the drug industry, in Art we are entitled to no comparable certainty. It may well be the case that the intellectual basis of Art studies is not accidentally but necessarily related to the art market. It may be the case, indeed, that the art market (along with other features of the Art Institution and its behaviour) is precisely and properly our subject matter.

Now it is not impossible to study one's own behaviour as an art-promotor, art authenticator, etc., along with the study of the behaviour of others. However, our reputation for objectivity and disinterestedness is likely to be enhanced if we detach ourselves as far as possible from the practices we wish to place under scrutiny. Certainly we must not mistake our own indulgence in these practices for the study of them, as if to organize an art exhibition (for example) were in itself to study Art. If we sell art, or profit from the sale of it, or merely authenticate and promote what we profit from, we shall rightly be mistrusted. More seriously (for mistrust can be unjustified) we shall be unable to defend our own practice, if we are challenged, in the same way as the biochemist — by drawing attention to a widely acknowledged independence between the intellectual basis of our subject, on the one hand, and the operation of market forces on the other. That is the point: it has nothing to do with any putative wickedness of commerce in general, or even of art commerce in particular.

There is a further point that must be made. The art marketing project that stimulated this discussion is concerned with transitional art, and the Visual Arts discipline at Flinders has a special interest in this topic in general, and in the transitional art of the Western Desert people in particular. It scarcely needs to be pointed out that our practical engagement in the promotion of an activity so close to the edge of cultural change is inescapably political. No

intervention in the world can be entirely neutral, but some degree of distancing is possible. If we are to seek engagement in the ordinary art-institutional practices, instead of detachment from them, we shall need first of all to show that our studies have a rationale uncompromised by this engagement and, secondly, we shall need to show that the chosen form of our intervention is politically justifiable. There is no way to show that it is not political.

In the case of Australian Aboriginal art, in particular, we must be very careful indeed to ensure that our public promotion of transitional art and artists does not even seem to be more advantageous to us than it is to the people who are the nominal beneficiaries.

I conclude that we should study and be seen to study the Art Institution (which inevitably includes ourselves) with as much objectivity as possible. We should not encourage students to sell art for our benefit, and we should not energetically promote marketable art — and especially new Aboriginal art — without a ready and sound justification for doing it ourselves and for doing it as we do. After all, there is no shortage of examples of art-promotion and commerce to examine, within the cultural ecology of the art world. If we think that our own enterprise would somehow be superior, we had better try to say why.

#### NOTES

1. For an overview of some recent opinions on the putative reduction of Cognitive Psychology to Physics, see Jerry A. Fodor, *Representations*, Harvester, Sussex, 1981, esp. Part II: 'Reduction and Unity of Science'.
2. One serious attempt, against the current mainstream, to make plausible the opinion that 'art' is, after all, a 'rigid designator' of a natural kind, is to be found in James D. Carney, 'A Kripkean approach to aesthetic theories', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Spring 1982.
3. This sort of position is not positively incompatible with a conception of works of art as a natural kind or a synthetic class. However, it does encourage a massive concentration on Art as a topic in the subject-region of Political or Cultural History. See, for recent examples of cognate attitudes, such studies as Roger L. Taylor, *Art, an Enemy of the People*, Harvester, Sussex, 1978.
4. The *locus classicus* of 'open concept' theory is Morris Weitz, 'The Role of Theory in Aesthetics' in Weitz, M. (ed.), *Problems in Aesthetics*, Macmillan, N.Y., 1959.
5. See especially George Dickie, *Art and the aesthetic*, Ithaca, N.Y., 1974 and Arthur Danto, 'The artworld', *J. Phil.*, 61, Oct. 1964, pp. 571-84. For criticisms of the Institutional Theory see, for example, Richard Wollheim, *Art and its objects*, 2nd ed., Cambridge U.P., Cambridge, 1980, esp. Supp. Essay I: 'The Institutional Theory of Art'.
6. See my 'A New Theory of Art', in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 20, 4, 1980.
7. Even this confidence is less than perfect. But we must draw our pragmatic lines somewhere.
8. A useful introduction to the intricacies of art-authentication, promotion and marketing is Robert Wraight, *The Art Game*, Frewin, London, 1965.